

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, MT
SUBJECT: DR. ANTON BUTTIGIEG ELECTED AS NEW PRESIDENT OF MALTA

REF: VALLETTA 1499,

1. ON DECEMBER 27, A SPECIAL SESSION OF THE MALTESE PARLIAMENT ELECTED DR. ANTON BUTTIGIEG, FORMER MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE MALTA LABOR PARTY, TO SUCCEED SIR ANTHONY MAMO AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MALTESE CONSTITUTION, PRESIDENT MAMO RETIRED ON CHRISTMAS DAY (THREE MONTHS AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION), AND PRIME MINISTER DOM MINTOFF NOMINATED DR. BUTTIGIEG TO SUCCEED HIM. THE MOTION WAS CARRIED WITHOUT A FORMAL DIVISION OF PARLIAMENT, ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION NATIONALISTS INDICATED THAT THEY DID NOT BELIEVE DR. BUTTIGIEG WAS THE BEST CHOICE FOR PRESIDENT.

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2. DR. BUTTIGIEG WAS BORN AT QALA, GOZO, ON FEBRUARY 19, 1912. HE RECEIVED A BA FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA IN 1933, STUDIED THEOLOGY FROM 1933 TO 1936, AND LAW FROM 1936 TO 1940, WHEN HE GRADUATED AT THE HEAD OF HIS CLASS WITH A DOCTORATE IN LAW.

3. FROM 1944 TO 1948, DR. BUTTIGIEG SERVED AS LAW REPORTER FOR THE "TIMES OF MALTA" AND HE BECAME THE EDITOR OF THE LABOR PARTY'S "VOICE OF MALTA" IN 1959.

4. DR. BUTTIGIEG WAS FIRST ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN 1950 AS A MEMBER OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PARTY (NOW DEFUNCT). HE WAS RETURNED AS A MEMBER OF THE MALTA LABOR PARTY IN 1956, AND IN EVERY SUBSEQUENT ELECTION, INCLUDING THE LATEST ONE IN SEPTEMBER 1976. DR. BUTTIGIEG ALSO SERVED AS DEPUTY LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY FOR THE PAST 21 YEARS. ON OCTOBER 15, HE RESIGNED BOTH HIS SEAT IN PARLIAMENT AND HIS POSITION AS DEPUTY LEADER OF THE LABOR PARTY, IN ORDER TO CLEAR THE WAY LEGALLY FOR HIS SUBSEQUENT ELECTION AS PRESIDENT. DR. BUTTIGIEG'S TERM AS PRESIDENT WILL BE FOR FIVE YEARS.

5. IN ADDITION TO HIS POLITICAL AND LEGAL ACTIVITIES, DR. BUTTIGIEG IS WELL-KNOWN AS ONE OF MALTA'S LEADING POETS (WRITING IN THE MALTESE LANGUAGE), AND HE HAS HAD NUMEROUS BOOKS OF POETRY PUBLISHED. TWICE A WIDOWER, DR. BUTTIGIEG WAS REMARRIED IN JUNE 1975 TO MARJORIE PATTERSON, A SCOTSWOMAN. BOTH HIS SON, JOHN BUTTIGIEG, AND HIS SON-IN-LAW, JOSEPH BRINCAT, ARE LABOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.

6. COMMENT: DR. BUTTIGIEG'S ELECTION AS PRESIDENT HAD BEEN WIDELY EXPECTED FOR MONTHS. IDENTIFIED THROUGHOUT HIS POLITICAL CAREER AS A HIGHLY PARTISAN LABORITE, DR. BUTTIGIEG WAS FAR FROM THE FIRST CHOICE AMONG NATIONALIST AND INDEPENDENT CIRCLES IN MALTA TO SUCCEED SIR ANTHONY MAMO. HOWEVER, AS USUAL, PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF HAD HIS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAY AND BUTTIGIEG WAS ELECTED. MOST MALTESE HOPE THAT BUTTIGIEG WILL "RISE TO THE OCCASION" AND MUTE HIS STRONG AND OFTEN OUTSPOKEN POLITICAL BELIEFS IN HIS NEW CEREMONIAL ROLE AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC. END COMMENT. WIGGINS

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